of the dead remained basically unchanged, Christian burial rites and cemeteries are generally used in the belief that they are efficacious in controlling ghosts. Girls were "shown to the people" after initiation, preferably on the mission station during the Easter dances. The kere which was a women's initiation dance, was also performed on a mission occasion (the celebration of St. Barnabas Day, in honour of the patron saint of this station).

What was the motive of mission teachers introducing a new form of initiation ritual to the Orokaiva? This extramural activity, performed in the dead of night, signified a little more than the intertribal status rivalry analysed earlier in this chapter. The text of the songs gives no obvious clues to their significance at the present time. Though it was made up of at least four or five languages, due to diffusion of the cycle through the Northern District, I managed to collect a translation of most of it during a tour of Port Moresby when we visited knowledgeable members of various Musa River tribes. The songs evoke a series of phases in a woman's life, stating symbolically her role in initiation, courtship, marriage, childbearing and feasting. They are very rich in symbolic content which is not relevant here. But they contain no message that can be related to any modern millennial or cargo cult. During a visit to Uiaku, in the Collingwood Bay district, my wife found that the old women in that village knew the songs but not the younger ones. This points to diffusion from the Musa to the Collingwood Bay district some decades ago. All this evidence confirms the mission teacher's own explanation given to me that he introduced this cycle in order to keep old traditions alive, in order to give more strength to the younger generation which had not been properly initiated.

I was impressed by the strong religious sentiment displayed by the performers especially in the very first dances. They might at that time be doubtful about dance movements and words but not about the demeanour appropriate to the impersonation of spirits. At the very first practise, even the young girls knew the right bearing, intonation and rhythm. This was not truly the introduction of an alien ritual; the purpose and the strategy could not have been more familiar.

The involvement of my wife in this initiatory ritual helped to lend it the ambiguity that was evidently intended. It was not the purpose of the mission teacher to set up this pagan ritual in opposition to Christianity but rather to bring about its continuity in a Christian order. I have already shown in earlier chapters that the Christian dispensation is conceived as not only a religious but also and importantly a socio-economic one--that Christianity, wealth and wage labour are perceived as part of the same complex. If it can be made to accommodate women's initiation ceremonies (after jettisoning, of course, those aspects to which the clergy takes exception) future generations will have the strength of the forefathers. This desire for greater strength, in a physical and numerical as well as spiritual sense, was often expressed to me.